

THE PERCEPTION AND POTENTIAL OF PRESERVATION IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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This paper consists of a discussion regarding the manner in which public libraries have reacted to the preservation field, which historically has been focused on the somewhat different needs of academic and research institutions. This discussion includes background information about the goals of the typical public library and the arguments put forth by public librarians as to why preservation is not their concern. Also discussed are the preservation problems to which public library collections are prone and the ways in which those problems are currently addressed.

Based on evidence indicating that public libraries are concerned with the state of their materials, whether or not it is termed "preservation," the paper suggests ways in which solutions devised by the academic preservation community could be applied to public library problems. The paper concludes with suggestions for and observations on the future of preservation in the public library environment.

Headings:

Preservation of library materials

Public libraries

The result of decades of research in preservation and conservation has been a wide body of knowledge and an ever-growing body of literature and tools for libraries interested in extending the useful lives of their materials. However, these resources have been created almost exclusively by and for academic and research libraries. Such institutions generally have very different goals and needs than most public libraries. When taken with the fact that most of the practical tools the field has produced are likewise geared toward academic and research libraries, this raises several questions. First, are public libraries concerned with preservation as it is practiced by academic libraries? And second, if they are concerned with such topics, what can be done about it? An examination of literature produced by the public library community can help answer these questions.

Before beginning, however, it is necessary to mention several caveats, the first of which is related to terminology. In this paper, “preservation” is used to mean any action that increases the useful life span of a book. In places it will be used interchangeably with the included topic of “conservation,” which are those measures taken once a book has deteriorated. Additionally, it is important to note that not all public libraries are the same. Some of the larger ones are research collections similar in scale to large academic libraries; their needs are more similar to those of academic institutions than to those of other public libraries. The size of a public library, its age, its available funding and staffing, the community in which it is located, and the nature of its collections are all factors which influence its operational needs. And finally, the recommendations made

by preservationists have not necessarily been universally adopted by the academic library community overall. As with most things, there are no absolutes here; the recommendations and observations made are generalizations, and as such will not apply to every situation.

History and Perception of Preservation in Public Libraries

Historically, preservation as a nameable concern has not been seen as one that affects public libraries, partially due to the way in which the field's activities were publicized. For several decades, the preservation of

the intellectual content of millions of embrittled works and the conservation of items with artifactual value...formed the popular image of preservation. The most successful publicity efforts—the film *Slow Fires*, for example—dealt with the potential loss of those records significant for the history of mankind...For many in the library community, this noble endeavor *is* preservation.¹

In other words, the problems preservation as an articulated field originally set out to solve were problems that plagued academic and research collections. Public libraries do not face these difficulties, at least not on the same level, so the solutions the field offered had no apparent relevance for them. The public library community did not consider preservation its concern.

This attitude has been reinforced by the literature that has come out of four decades of preservation research being very focused on the academic environment. Those who do the research, write the articles, and prepare the manuals work within the context of research-level collections, more often than not, and understandably they write with the goals and needs of their own and their peer institutions in mind. The resulting

¹ Benjamin F. Speller, "Reconceptualizing Preservation," *North Carolina Libraries* 52, no.1 (1994): 3.

literature, therefore, can look as though it has no relevance to the needs of a public library. For example, one resource, when discussing book repair, states that

It can not be emphasized too strongly that repair, no matter how well-intentioned, has enormous potential to cause serious and irreversible harm to the very materials it seeks to preserve. Nearly all repair procedures, beyond simple rehousing, may lead directly to loss of value (intellectual, aesthetic, economic, etc.). Less obviously it may also lead to a loss of value over the course of the life of the book, as a repair that appears to have been successful at the time it is executed may, over time, result in damage, whether through choice of materials whose aging behavior is not what had been expected, through mechanical failure of the repair, or through unfortunate interactions between materials.²

The author goes on to say that repair is not something that can be learned simply from books or attendance at a few workshops; it requires years of practice and feedback from an experienced instructor. The implicit message here is a valid one, as it seeks to impress upon those who are minimally trained in repair techniques that they are not professional conservators and should not attempt to treat items of significance or value. However, if a public library has a staff member with any practical knowledge of repair, he or she probably acquired it in the very ways this author says it cannot be learned. For instance, a Florida survey indicated that those libraries which were taking steps to preserve their materials were doing so through the efforts of staff who had “learned preservation techniques on their own, through in-house workshops conducted by teachers of unknown competence, or through one, two or three-day workshops.”³ Additionally, much of the typical public library collection consists of popular materials which circulate heavily for a time and are discarded when demand for them is no longer high. The idea of “value” in that context is very different than it would be in an academic environment. A resource

² California Preservation Clearinghouse, “Book Repair,” <http://cpc.stanford.edu/collections/repair/>

³ John N. DePew, *An Investigation of Preservation Service Needs and Options for Florida Libraries: Final Report* (Tallahassee: Florida Department of State Division of Library and Information Services, 1990), 17.

such as this one, when viewed within the context of a public library, could be seen as inapplicable.

Another example of this phenomenon comes from the preface to a useful series of preservation manuals. The preface, which appears in each of the guides, states that, although developed by the Association of Research Libraries, they will “prove useful to all those involved in preservation work in academic and research libraries.”⁴ Several of these manuals, particularly those dealing with staff and user education and general collections conservation, contain information that can be applied in a wide variety of library environments. The way in which that information is presented, however, is tailored to the concerns of academic and research collections, which may result in limited use by other sectors.

Points of Departure

The needs and goals of academic and public libraries do differ, in some respects greatly. For example, materials purchased for a research collection will generally need to be retained longer than those purchased for a public library. While both types of institution want to keep items for as long as they are useful, the academic span of “useful” tends to be much longer than the public one. This is generally related to the nature of their respective collections. While the specifics can and do vary greatly, academic libraries tend to focus their collecting on materials of enduring scholarly and cultural significance, while public libraries generally collect more popular materials. Advice geared toward the specific needs of the one, therefore, can seemingly have little to do with the other; “some of the preservation experts... treat all questions with an eye

⁴ Jutta Reed-Scott, “Preface,” in *Staff Training and User Awareness in Preservation Management* (Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, 1993), iii.

to the ages and with no thought at all to the present pragmatic problems of keeping the library's broken-down "untreasures."⁵ When the concern is for the present, not the ages, as it is for most public libraries, such advice can appear to provide too stringent a solution to the problem.

The nature of the use materials receive is another difference. Most books held by a public library are expected to hold up for at least 20 circulations; children's books are expected to survive 90 before being weeded.⁶ Academic libraries have many materials, such as reserves and other items used in undergraduate instruction, that are heavily used, but they also have many that leave the shelf rarely, if ever. However, while the number of high-use books may be greater for an average academic library, simply due to the size of the collection, it is likely that an average public library collection will have a greater proportion of heavily-used materials.

The attitude toward materials is likewise a point of departure between the two communities. Academic and research libraries are structured for long-term retention. The mission of such institutions usually involves collecting materials of enduring cultural and scholarly value, as well as purchasing materials that support research and teaching. In addition, books as artifactual objects, not only as vehicles for information, can be important, as they contain unique physical evidence that helps provide the historical context for their content. For example, "paper quality, page size, textual layout, choice of letterforms, and arrangement of illustrations... can be significant indicators of how the text thus displayed was regarded by its producers and how it was interpreted by its

⁵Robert and GraceAnne A. DeCandido, "Micro-Preservation: Conserving the Small Library," *Library Resources and Technical Services* 29, no. 2 (1985): 151.

⁶Nancy Carlson Schrock, "On Target: Reaching the Public Through Preservation," in *Promoting Preservation Awareness in Libraries: A Sourcebook for Academic, Public, School, and Special Collections*, ed. Jeanne M. Drewes and Julie A. Page (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 176.

readers.”⁷ Such evidence, unlike the textual content, cannot be completely reproduced, and so the book has an intellectual, cultural, or historical value separate from its text. The idea of preserving holdings comes naturally in such an environment, since doing so helps fulfill the institutional mission.

The attitude toward public library materials is quite different. Public library collections undergo high turnover, with materials withdrawn once they are no longer popular to make room for the next wave. In such an environment, books as objects become less important; often it is the content, which can be available in a variety of containers, that is desired. While a book has attributes that make it valuable to the institution, it is not valuable as a unique artifact. This state of affairs has helped foster the image of public libraries as having rotating stock, rather than a permanent collection, and thus, no need to preserve things while they are there.

The Arguments against Preservation by Public Libraries

The public library community itself presents a number of arguments as to why preservation is not an appropriate concern for it. One of the major arguments is that they are not in the business of long-term collection, “not meant to be permanent storage centers for the world’s heritage.”⁸ It is the responsibility of academic libraries, they argue, to save books for the future; the job of the public library is to satisfy the present. Books are purchased, used until they are no longer useful, and removed to make room for more. One famous (or perhaps infamous) public library director has gone so far as to say

⁷ Modern Language Association of America, "Statement on the Significance of Primary Records," <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/byorg/mla/mlaprim.html>.

⁸ Stanley Slote, *Weeding Library Collections: Library Weeding Methods*, 4th ed. (Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1997), 41.

that “saving books is absolute poison to effective public library service.”⁹ In his view, that is an attempt to be all things to all people, an attempt which is doomed to failure, simply because their “limited financial resources assure us of failure in any one area of service as a result of trying to be successful in all.”¹⁰ It would, in other words, be spreading the library too thin.

Following this argument is another: the nature and treatment of public library collections makes the preservation of them unnecessary. They tend to be smaller than research collections, made up of newer, non-unique materials, used heavily, and weeded aggressively. If public library collections are not unique and will be completely new within a decade anyway, goes the argument, why waste time and money trying to preserve them? This attitude has led some writers to argue that public librarians can fall into the trap of seeing their collections as expendable.¹¹ A better term might be disposable, implying that the resource is useful until it has been ‘used up,’ which in this instance would mean damaged beyond redemption or no longer suitable for community needs.

There are also administrative challenges to implementing preservation programs in public libraries. Recognizing the preservation needs of the library, choosing the best contextual way to meet them, and then actually performing the actions that will execute those plans consumes human, fiscal, and material resources which, in many libraries, may be in short supply. As one public librarian put it, the profession faces a “Chimera when dealing with preservation issues—a tripartite monster made up of lack of time,

⁹ Charles Robinson, “Can We Save the Public’s Library?” *Library Journal* (September 1, 1989): 148.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Schrock, “On Target,” 175.

money and expertise.”¹² A library may have no budget for preservation, no one knowledgeable about what must be done, and no one with the available time to either learn or practice. Preservation, particularly from the ground up, would be a great deal of work, and “so much needs to be done in the basic areas of reference, acquisition, and technical processing that the question of preservation is seen as irrelevant—or even impertinent.”¹³

All these arguments have combined to make preservation in public libraries a rather low priority, if it appears as an articulated concern at all. A preservation survey conducted in Florida indicated that 35 percent of the responding public libraries were taking no steps at all to extend the useful lives of their holdings.¹⁴ If the tools and ideas that have come out of the academic world are to be useful, they will have to be adapted to a public library context. The goals and needs of public libraries have been partially covered already, but there are additional aspects that must be mentioned.

The Needs of the Public Library

The first of these is a concern that unites them firmly with all other library types. Stretching the budgets that have tended to become more and more limited over time is a universal concern. While all libraries may be striving toward the same goal—getting the best value for the available funding—not all of them will go about it in the same way. For example, a public library serving a large community of teenagers may choose to purchase young adult fiction in paperback rather than hardcover, since teens seem to prefer paperbacks. Their financial resources would be well-used by purchasing items

¹²Pat Ryckman, “Taming the Chimera: Preservation in a Public Library,” *North Carolina Libraries* 52 (Spring 1994), 8.

¹³DeCandido, “Micro-Preservation,” 151.

¹⁴Susan L. Tolbert, “Preservation in American Public Libraries: A Contradiction in Terms?” *Public Libraries* 36, no. 4 (July-August 1997), 237.

that patrons want in a format they will use. On the other hand, an academic departmental science library purchasing items in a high-use core area may not be utilizing its funding well if it buys a work in paperback rather than hardcover. As with so many other aspects of the library world, it is not the fundamentals which differ in this regard, but the context. Both of these example libraries have the same goal, but it is fulfilled in different ways for each.

Another goal is the provision of as many appropriate services as possible. Again, this is a goal and commitment that both academic and public libraries share; it is simply expressed differently and to different degrees. There are many practical reasons for emphasizing patron services. For example, providing good service to users can help academic libraries build support among their patron base and build a better case for budget season; it is a good way to help convince people that the library is necessary.¹⁵ But beyond that, “good service adds value to library resources...a good collection of journals is useful, but a good collection that is available in a timely and consistent manner is much more useful.”¹⁶

Although it may be for different reasons, the public library community likewise places great importance on the service aspect of their role. In fact, “even the basic function of collection development is typically seen as an element in the provision of services rather than as an end in itself.”¹⁷ In such a mindset, the emphasis is on the object insofar as it is useful. Again, both public and academic libraries require some

¹⁵ Susan Wehmeyer, Dorothy Auchter, and Arnold Hirshton, *Saying What We Will Do, And Doing What We Say: Implementing A Customer Service Plan*, *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 22, no. 3 (1996): 179.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁷ Robert M. Hayes and Virginia A. Walter, *Strategic Management for Public Libraries* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996), 21.

degree of perceived usefulness in their holdings; it is the definition and context of “useful” that differs. In the public library environment, the collection development and acquisitions process consists of

identifying popular materials as soon as they are announced for distribution, predicting the volume of local demand, and then buying quickly in appropriate quantities. When public interest in certain authors, subjects or formats wanes, the unwanted materials are removed from the collection to make room for those of rising popularity.¹⁸

Unlike most other types of libraries, public libraries expect that most of the material they purchase will be used almost as soon as it is shelved. Heavily anticipated bestsellers may never even reach the shelves before being used; for some there will be a reserve list begun while the title is still on order, and it will go from processing straight to the first patron. Meeting expressed or anticipated customer needs can be an aspect of fulfilling a service commitment, and in this context means that multiple copies will often be obtained to meet patron demands. Occasionally, this will mean that the decision will be made to purchase copies based on projections of that demand; fewer different titles are purchased overall, but more copies of requested titles are acquired.¹⁹ One library has decided that their goal is “to maintain a ratio of one copy for each two holds and each week a list of titles that fall outside that formula is generated by the automation system;” the resulting list is checked promptly and “beef-up” orders sent as rush items to Technical Services.²⁰ Another has decided on a 3 to 1 ratio of holds to copies as their

¹⁸ Rose Mary Magrill and John Corbin, *Acquisitions Management and Collection Development in Libraries*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: American Library Association, 1989), 42, quoted in Alice Gertzog and Edwin Beckerman, *Administration of the Public Library* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1994), 168.

¹⁹ The Baltimore County Public Library’s Blue Ribbon Committee, *Give ‘Em What They Want! Managing the Public’s Library* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1992), 22.

²⁰ Catherine Gibson, “‘But We’ve Always Done It This Way!’ Centralized Selection Five Years Later,” in *Public Library Collection Development in the Information Age*, ed. Annabel K. Stephens (New York: Haworth Press, 1998), 39.

purchasing goal, even on the most in-demand works.²¹ Yet other institutions may choose to lease books to meet a temporary surge in demand (for bestsellers, for example) while purchasing multiple copies of high-circulation items for which demand is steadier. Overall, however, additions to the collection are made with the idea that they are meant to be ephemeral, that they will be discarded once they are no longer being used, but that use will be immediate and unremitting until that time.

This emphasis on public service is also apparent in the way in which physical environment is addressed. In preservation literature great stress is made on the fact that controlling the library environment with regard to temperature, humidity, external pollutants, and pests (and anything that might attract them) is one of the best ways to ensure the longevity of materials in good condition. Human comfort is of course taken into consideration, but, at least in this subfield of academic librarianship, in the main the emphasis is on the materials. In literature relating to public libraries, when the environment is addressed (which does not often occur), the well-being of the collections is not the motivating concern. Environment is mentioned primarily in regard to patron and staff comfort and the resulting use of the library. One rather straightforward avowal regarding cleanliness sums up the general attitude nicely, by stating that “it is important to keep the library neat and clean so that the patrons want to come to the library and check things out.”²² Another, somewhat more elaborative manual states that “clean, attractive, and adequately maintained facilities are an important aspect of the total service philosophy. Poorly maintained facilities create a negative perception with the public that

²¹ Gwinnet County Public Library, *Gwinnett County Public Library Weeding Guidelines* (Chicago: Public Library Association, 1998), 53.

²² Sherry McCreath, “Circulation and Its Challenges” *Nebraska Library Association Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (2000): 15.

eventually translates into reduced use of the facility.”²³ And while maintaining a temperature between 70 and 72 degrees Fahrenheit may be recommended for the well-being of collections, the public library community generally operates on the theory that air conditioning is essential, because “users stay away if the air-conditioning is not working properly.”²⁴ There is rarely mention of cleanliness deterring pests that can damage materials or a proper air-conditioning system helping to prevent mold. The emphasis is on the needs and comfort of the patrons, and the fact that use will diminish if those needs are not met.

Even such things as shelving, which is so essential as to be almost invisible, can be part of the public service mentality. Preservation manuals stress that wood shelving should be avoided whenever possible and that finishes on metal shelving should be noninteractive.²⁵ It may be that public libraries, when purchasing new shelving, choose a preservationally sound option. However, the shelving being good from a preservationist standpoint may not be why it was chosen; in such a purchase, it is safe to say that there are competing priorities. The suitability of shelving for merchandising is one.²⁶ Materials must be made visible and appealing for browsing patrons; whether or not the shelving is coated with a noninteractive substance matters little in this regard.

This idea of merchandising relates to another of the public library community’s concerns: attractiveness. Public library patrons tend to be browsers; one library estimated that as many as 85% of their “customers” are browsers.²⁷ In this respect,

²³ BCPL, *Give ‘Em What They Want!*, 137.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 135 & 137.

²⁵ Barbra Buckner Higgenbotham and Judith W. Wild, *The Preservation Program Blueprint* (Chicago, American Library Association, 2001), 23.

²⁶ Robinson, “Can We Save the Public’s Library?”, 148.

²⁷ GCPL, *Weeding Guidelines*, 53.

public libraries have more in common with bookstores than academic or research libraries. Even the terminology is similar. Literature written by the public library community will often mention “merchandising,” “customers,” and “satisfying the market,” reflecting the idea that these books must be ‘sold’ to users of the facility.²⁸ As one librarian put it: “Whether we like it or not, we live in a visual age. We compete with Web sites, TV, movies, ads, and bookstores, so we need to look good.”²⁹ Advice that sounds like a bookstore chain’s marketing strategy, such as “attractive displays of seasonal material or new books will often catch a patron’s eye,” is not uncommon.³⁰ While the recently increased emphasis on information as a commodity has led some academic and research librarians to begin thinking of and referring to their institutions in business terms, it generally has not taken quite the same form as the above examples. Patrons of academic and research collections are generally searching for a known item and are thus relatively unconcerned with appearance; if the information the resource contains is appropriate to the task at hand, the resource will probably be used, condition notwithstanding. In a browsing environment, however, the eye-catching and attractive is important. An attractive collection is a better-used collection, and a better-used collection is an excellent bargaining point come budget time. Thus weeding guidelines often tend to recommend that books in “unattractive” physical condition be replaced with cleaner, brighter, unscathed copies. Commercial rebindings are often discouraged in this advice, again for reasons of patron reaction and resulting use: “Rebound books, especially fiction, just do not circulate. Patrons want pretty covers and dust jackets that

²⁸ Ibid., 53, and Jean-Barry Molz, quoted in Nancy Pearl, “Gave ‘em What They Wanted” *Library Journal* 121, no. 1 (September 1, 1996): 137.

²⁹ Merle Jacob, “Weeding the Fiction Collection, Or Should I Dump Peyton Place?” *Reference and User Services Quarterly* 40, no.3 (2001), 235.

³⁰ McCreath, “Circulation and Its Challenges,” 15.

tell them what the book is about. Dump the rebounds and buy new trade or mass-market paperbacks.”³¹ In an environment that is characterized by a strong patron service ethic and evaluated in terms of use, providing items that do not meet patron needs and do not get used is considered a waste of time and money.

Public Library Materials-Related Problems

Even though the fundamental values may be the same, the needs and goals of public libraries, then, are in some cases far removed from those of academic and research collections. However, just like the latter, public library collections are prone to experience materials-related problems, to which a number of factors contribute.

The first of these contributing factors is the high use their collections receive. As noted before, public librarians expect most books to hold up for 20 circulations, and children’s books are expected to withstand 90.³² The collection development goals of public libraries can be summarized relatively briefly: “purchasing the titles [patrons] want in an initially attractive format.”³³ A mark of succeeding in those goals is circulation statistics; if something is desirable it will be used more frequently. Despite the assumption that most acquisitions will be withdrawn within a relatively short period of time, the materials will be subjected to substantial use during the time that they are there. A high return is expected out of the investment, and this can lead to problems related to condition.

There is another area of concern, which, when combined with high use, is the cause of most deterioration of public library collections: poor-quality publisher’s

³¹ Jacob, “Weeding the Fiction Collection,” 238.

³² Schrock, “On Target,” 176.

³³ Anne L. Reynolds, Nancy C. Schrock, and Joanna Walsh, “Preservation: The Public Library Response,” *Library Journal* 114 (15 February 1989), 130.

bindings. Popular works—which also tend to have the aesthetic qualities that patrons want—are not constructed to stand up to repetitive and prolonged use, so the amount they see in public libraries can inflict extensive damage. A survey conducted at the Wellesley Library indicated that “most damage results from heavy public use of poor-quality publishers’ bindings that account for 74 percent of the collection.”³⁴

This is a source of particular concern in several sub-genres. For instance, children’s books are especially susceptible to the dual forces of heavy use and shoddy construction; recall that they tend to circulate even more often than works for other audiences. Books for very young children—picture books—“tend to go out twice as many times as the average turnover rate and are usually weeded simply because of wear and tear.”³⁵

Adult fiction is another area of particular concern when it comes to publisher’s bindings and high use. One collection survey found that these books “were newer and should have been in better shape than many other materials but were actually in the worst condition,” a fact the author also ascribed to frequent returns via the book drop.³⁶ Other collection surveys have returned similar findings: while generally a newer collection, adult fiction is nevertheless in the worst condition of any category.³⁷ Public libraries strive to meet their patrons’ needs by purchasing the desired titles in formats that are aesthetically pleasing, but their very success results in damage to the materials.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ BCPL, *Give ‘Em What They Want*, 72.

³⁶ Nancy Carlson Schrock, “A Collection Condition Survey Model for Public Libraries,” in *Advances in Preservation and Access*, Vol. 2, ed. Barbara Buckner Higginbotham (Medford, NJ: Learned Information, 1995), 220.

³⁷ Reynolds et al., “The Public Library Response,” 129-130.

Nor are these the only materials-related problems that can result from some of the ways a public library might choose to meet its patrons' needs. Book drops are a common compromise that many public librarians are more willing to make in the name of service. They are a convenience for patrons, particularly in systems with multiple branches and/or bookmobile service. However, they can cause severe damage to materials; corners may be broken, pages ripped, and textblocks torn away from covers.³⁸ Eliminating book drops is often the first piece of advice offered to libraries with a limited preservation budget.

There is another example that illustrates both this phenomenon and the potential reason why the public library community has apparently not seen much relevance in preservation information resources. Since most public library patrons are browsers, shelving materials so that spines are easily visible is a way to cater to their needs. However, when it comes to oversize materials, this practice can harm the materials. The hinges of the book tear under its weight, causing the textblock to sag and the spine to warp, with the eventual result that the book pulls out of its cover. As one public library sourcebook stated, the practice of interfiling oversize works and shelving them spine up

is acceptable if the work is an ephemeral one that will be discarded in a few years anyway. However, because spine-up shelving will eventually damage most works, it is not suitable for items that the library expects to retain for a long time (e.g., local history items).³⁹

In other words, if the item is predestined for weeding, there are some public libraries willing to damage it in the name of patron service. Academic libraries have similar ephemeral materials for which this type shelving would not be an issue either. However,

³⁸ Quoted in Robert DeCandido, *Collections Conservation* (Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, 1993), 14.

³⁹ Baker, *The Responsive Public Library Collection*, 127.

those items are the exception, rather than the rule. Most academic library materials are acquired with the understanding that they will be part of the collection for the long-term, and that is the context in which these preservation resources are written. Thus the numerous repetitions that “fore edge shelving is unacceptable since it can cause the book block to loosen from its case” and that shelving on the spine is the preferable way of dealing with an oversize book.⁴⁰ The underlying idea expressed in these works is applicable to public libraries as well as academic: the appropriate level of care is partially dependent on how long the item needs to last. However, the language used to convey that leaves no room for exceptions; some libraries, academic as well as public, may have rejected this and other similar resources as too inflexible.

Particular Types of Damage

Given these contributing factors, there are specific types of damage that most plague public libraries. The most commonly mentioned are torn pages, ripped-out pages, loose hinges, ripped spines, and torn covers. The collection survey in Wellesley found that “fully 63 percent of the repairs needed were found in hinges and spines,” courtesy of multiple circulations and returns via the book drop.⁴¹ Another collection survey reported that, in addition to overall condition being related to binding type, the specific types of damage were as well. Although all bindings sustained some damage overall, paperbacks were particularly prone to problems with covers and spine, while hardcover trade binding and children’s books suffered most from loose or broken hinges.⁴²

⁴⁰ Quoted in Sherry Byrne, *Collection Maintenance and Improvement* (Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, 1993), 55.

⁴¹ Reynolds et al., “The Public Library Response,” 130.

⁴² Schrock, “A Collection Condition Survey Model,” 218.

With the sum of these circumstances, the public library's goal of providing attractive copies of works to a browsing customer base, and doing so in such a way that keeps the wait for a title to the bare minimum, is somewhat compromised. Wear and tear make it less likely, in a browsing environment, that an item will be chosen. The sorts of problems mentioned above also make it more likely that a title, even one still in high demand, will be withdrawn from the collection. In such decisions, physical condition is stressed heavily, occasionally to the point where it overrides all other factors.⁴³

While issues related to popular materials and circulating collections may be the most visible of public libraries' materials-related problems, there are also issues related to another collection area, that made up of what may be termed "nondisposable" materials. The general perception of public library collections is that they are comprised of nothing but current works which will be discarded fairly soon. While it is true that a large portion of any given collection will likely be very recent materials destined for early withdrawal, it is equally true that any given collection will have a large number of enduring older works. A collection survey of four public libraries found that while the majority of the works were new, with close to half having been published within the last decade, all of them had core collections made up of older works.⁴⁴ What sorts of materials make up these core collections? Works of adult non-fiction, for one, particularly those which are definitive within their subject areas. Reference works also tend to be of use for a long time, as well as being expensive. Special collections are another area making up this core. They are more common among public libraries than one might think, because while they may not be designated as special collections, "even

⁴³ GCPL, *Weeding Guidelines*, 59.

⁴⁴ Schrock, "A Collection Condition Survey Model," 215.

the tiniest...holds unique materials, usually relating to its community's local history.”⁴⁵

The types of materials contained in such collections can vary widely, as can the types of damage to which they are prone.

Finally, mutilation is another materials-related problem experienced by public libraries. It is important to note, however, that this is hardly a problem specific to public libraries; it is endemic to the library community overall. A multiple-library collection survey performed in the mid-1990s found that all institutions involved had similar rates of mutilation, 15-17 percent of the collection having minor injuries and 1-3 percent sustaining major damage.⁴⁶ While the advent of photocopiers may have reduced mutilation overall, it still occurs, for a variety of reasons. Issues of convenience may be behind some instances of mutilation, with patrons ripping out pages rather than taking notes or paying for photocopies. Some acts may be the result of malice, while others may stem from a failure to appreciate that library materials are shared property.

Public Library Responses to Materials-Related Problems

Currently, there are several main approaches taken by public libraries in dealing with materials-related problems. The most visible of these is weeding. While one of the primary uses of weeding is freeing up space for new acquisitions by removing little-used titles, it is also used for what is perhaps an even more important consideration: keeping the collection attractive (and circulation rates high) by removing items that appear worn. Materials of poor appearance feature heavily on lists of what to discard in weeding guidelines, because, as one such source put it, the collection is made “more appealing by replacing ragged, smudged books and unattractive rebinds with attractive new books.

⁴⁵ Ryckman, “Chimera,” 8.

⁴⁶ Schrock, “A Collection Condition Survey Model,” 220.

Circulation can be increased by simply making the shelves look nicer, even when there are fewer books.”⁴⁷ What precisely is withdrawn to make the collection more appealing? A typical rule suggests the removal of “all materials that are damaged, soiled, stained or have torn or missing pages or ripped bindings... items that appear worn out and books with yellowed or brittle pages.”⁴⁸ That covers a remarkable amount of ground, and the writers certainly did not intend for it to be followed blindly. The library’s sole reference work on a particular subject, for example, is likely to be retained regardless of rips and wear, at least until a new copy or different source of the same information can be obtained. Another series of guidelines for weeding fiction is especially stringent, advising that public libraries remove books with yellow, brittle, torn, marked, or missing pages, books with broken bindings, mass market paperbacks with “tattered covers and soiled pages,” and books that smell or are moldy.⁴⁹ Note that, with the exception of the last category, none of these reasons would necessarily be grounds for immediate removal from a research collection. However, each type is something physically unattractive, a reason for a customer to leave that particular work on the shelves.

Mending, which is generally mentioned as an aspect of the weeding process, is another way that some public libraries treat their materials-related problems. They do try to keep it all in perspective, though; as one librarian pointed out, “sometimes you can spend more money mending a paperback than what it would cost to replace it with a new copy.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Belinda Boon, *The CREW Method: Expanded Guidelines for Collection Evaluation and Weeding for Small and Medium-Sized Public Libraries*, Revision of ... (Austin: Texas State Library, 1995), 5.

⁴⁸ GCPL, *Weeding Guidelines*, 3.

⁴⁹ Jacob, “Weeding the Fiction Collection,” 237.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

This ties into the final way in which materials-related issues are addressed: replacement. One subject area in which this is utilized heavily is the children's collection. Children's books were discussed before as being particularly prone to damage, due to the combined factors of poor construction and heavy use. This makes them particularly prone to weeding and replacement as well, a fact that partially explains their relatively large financial allocation. Although the exact figures will vary depending on community makeup and circulation statistics, most public libraries allocate the children's department between 20 and 30% of the total materials budget.⁵¹ When juvenile fiction is weeded, the typical advice is to replace classic works, award winners, and, if it is part of the library's collection policy, in-demand popular materials that have been read to pieces.

In terms of the preferred replacements, the rallying cry of the public library seems to be paperbacks, "clean, easy-to-store, attractive, inexpensive paperbacks."⁵² Recall that various collection surveys have found paperbacks to be in the worst condition after the least amount of time of any other binding type. Replacing self-destructed ones with still more might seem to be a self-defeating approach. However, the typical public library attitude toward this is that, "because they are inexpensive, any paperback that has circulated six times is a wonderful bargain in terms of justifying its purchase and the space it occupied."⁵³ They take up less space than hardcovers, cost about half as much, and have just as much if not more eye appeal.

⁵¹ Gertzog and Beckerman, *Administration*, 343.

⁵² Boon, *The CREW Method*, 55.

⁵³ GCPL, *Weeding Guidelines*, 59.

While each library will of course have a different way to process replacements, the manner in which the Baltimore County Public Library has organized the replacement process is a telling one when looking at priorities. The current system is as follows:

we do replacement lists yearly for adult fiction, easies (picture books), I Can Reads, and, in alternate years, children's fiction, YA, folk and fairy tales. We divide the Dewey collection in half and compile replacement lists for one-half one year and the other half the second year. We don't aim for comprehensive lists but rather include titles that need to be replaced because they are perennially requested.⁵⁴

Each branch is then allotted a budget devoted solely to ordering titles that appear on those replacement lists, although the budget vagaries that afflict all libraries have meant that "the money allotted to branches to order from replacement lists as well as the number of lists issued has decreased."⁵⁵

This relates to a secondary point: replacement as a solution to the problems of damage can carry an expensive price tag. The collection survey conducted at Wellesley found that an estimated 6650 books needed to be replaced, at an estimated cost of \$200,000.⁵⁶ While the Wellesley Library was able to obtain the money for replacement from local sources, it is important to bear in mind that the community in which it is situated is affluent. While not all public libraries are severely underfunded, not all of them have financial resources similar to Wellesley's, either. It is unlikely that many public libraries would have the funding for \$200,000 worth of necessary replacements. Even Wellesley has experienced difficulties, in that "the relatively limited funds available for books over the past several years have had obvious consequences. When

⁵⁴ BCPL, *Give 'Em What They Want*, " 34 & 36.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Reynolds et al., "The Public Library Response," 130.

funds no longer stretch to multiple copies or to frequent replacement, the entire collection suffers.”⁵⁷

Evidence of Public Library Concern

There are arguments put forth by public librarians that preservation is not their concern and evidence found in the literature they produce that they neither want nor require preservation of the sort that academic libraries practice. Despite this, however, there are certainly indications that public librarians are concerned with preservation issues, mostly relating to the state of their materials.

Mold, for example, is certainly recognized as a problem; moldy items are candidates for immediate removal, because they pose a threat to the rest of the collection.⁵⁸ Mending has its place in almost every public library, and even the aggressive weeding that many of them practice is done partially with the intent of improving the overall physical condition of the collection. In this an odd contradiction is visible: weeding justifies *not* doing much preservation work, but a great deal of material is withdrawn due to poor physical condition, not because the items are no longer useful. As one guide to weeding put it, when describing the reasons why removing damaged materials was necessary, “the physical condition of the Library’s collection sends an important message to our customers about the value we place on their materials.”⁵⁹ We value these materials and are attempting to keep your collection in good condition, this says; perhaps you should as well.

More evidence is available in the advice on replacement and selection. One resource suggests that when replacing ragged children’s classics and award winners, if it

⁵⁷ Ibid., 131.

⁵⁸ GCPL, *Weeding Guidelines*, 237.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 3.

is possible, “select titles that come with library binding and avoid any drab, coarse, or heavy bindings that include dull covers; they will not ‘sell.’”⁶⁰ This combines both the public library mentality (pick something pretty) with the preservation priority of selecting something durable. The same source, when discussing the merits of having something, anything, on a particular subject versus having nothing at all, finally decides that “if you really need a resource on a particular subject, acquire something new, accurate, well-written, and sturdily-bound.”⁶¹ For at least some public libraries, the relative strength of binding is a concern.

While there are numerous small examples of this unspoken concern with preservation, the most obvious and striking example comes from a small public library in Nebraska. Rough handling by patrons was resulting in a higher than acceptable number of books that had to be withdrawn due to damage, and there was no way to answer the patron excuse that it had been in that condition upon checkout. Their solution? When books are checked in,

they are given careful inspection before they are shelved. Any minor wear is noted on the pocket, dated, and initialed by the person who did the checking. Major problems are either sent to our bindery shelves or considered for withdrawal or replacement. Although it is a somewhat time consuming duty, it allows us to say, with confidence, “I know we didn’t put it on the shelf that way.”⁶²

While the library staff is not adamant that patrons pay for the damage they cause, they are adamant that the patrons speak with them about it. Returns are usually examined while the borrower is still in the library, so that staff can ask about any problems, and

⁶⁰ Boon, *CREW*, 19.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁶² Delores Feeken Schmidt, “Balancing Circulation and Collection,” *Nebraska Library Association Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (2000): 12.

there is a form letter sent to patrons who use the book drop “requesting them to stop by and visit with us about the damage.”⁶³ The end result is that patrons are “made aware that we are vigilant about our collection,” and have themselves become more attentive to the condition of materials.⁶⁴

The striking aspect of this particular example is that it deals with one of the fundamental concepts in preservation—the prevention of damage by proper handling—and yet never mentions it as such. It was written for a special issue of the periodical in which it appeared, one dealing with circulation concerns. The angle this author chose to take to the topic was balancing circulation with collection:

When considering the issues of circulation, I think of a weight scale that carefully balances circulation on one side and collection on the other. Each certainly affects the other: without circulation, there’s no goal for the collection; without a good collection, there is little circulation.⁶⁵

The word “preservation” appears nowhere at all in the article, but this library is certainly concerned with the topic. In support of circulation and access, they concentrate on tracking problems with the materials, correcting them as soon as possible, and addressing the source in an attempt to prevent future problems.

Overall, then, there is evidence that preservation is a concern for public as well as academic libraries, even if in different ways, to a different degree, and for different reasons. Given that this common ground does exist, what solutions can the preservation world offer to the problems that public libraries experience? What must be done to make those solutions workable?

Academic Preservation Solutions for Public Libraries

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Before anything else, it is important to take stock of what is actually needed. A preservation program that is not tailored properly to the institution's identifiable needs and available resources is not useful. After all, some portions of the collection may require a great deal of attention to maintain them in useable order, others may require regular replacement, and others may be allowed to wear out with no worry.

In some cases, a collection survey can prove useful in determining where to start. While the resources for this may not be readily obtainable from local sources, there are other options available. For example, in 2000 Arkansas began the Arkansas Preservation Site Survey Program, a project supported by LSTA funding and conducted by Amigos Library Services, Inc. Free to libraries of all types across the state, the program was designed to "include an analysis of the condition of the library's collection, all buildings, facilities, and environmental conditions as well as disaster planning and repair and treatment methods."⁶⁶ In this respect, as in other areas of preservation concern, a lack of immediate funding is not necessarily a barrier to action.

Once the portions of the collections which are targets for additional measures have been identified, efforts should be directed primarily toward "preservation in support of circulation and network-wide access. This should include preventive maintenance and minor repair, focusing on the hinges that deteriorate first, to keep the publishers' trade bindings in circulation as long as possible."⁶⁷ Circulation and customer service are important in the public library environment, and such measures are ways to help support that.

⁶⁶ Arkansas State Library, "Survey to Focus on Preservation," *The News* (July/August 2000): 1.

⁶⁷ Schrock, "A Collection Condition Survey Model," 227.

One of the first, best, and most widely applicable of preservation solutions is education, which can “provide the highest returns for the lowest cost of any preservation activity a library might initiate.”⁶⁸ Educating staff in such things as the proper way to handle, shelve, and photocopy books is a low- or no-cost way to help prevent excess damage to materials. Education, particularly in proper handling methods, is a preservation approach that is preventive rather than corrective. Damage is avoided, rather than fixed, and in this fact lies perhaps the greatest value of preventive preservation: “If you can avoid damage to books, you can spend less on repair and replacement. That saves precious money, and it simply makes sense.”⁶⁹ Including instruction in care and handling in new staff orientations can provide a foundation, and constant review combined with periodic refreshers can go a long way toward maintaining the standard of practice. This is particularly important for circulation staff, first because they of all staff handle materials most frequently. It is also particularly important to educate circulation staff because they are the most visible of all those in the library, and thus their example will set the tone for what patrons do:

If the staff member checking out a book treats it roughly, borrowers will, consciously or unconsciously, learn to devalue the book and treat it in a similar manner. If the borrower returning a book notices that books have been allowed to accumulate like so much trash in the library book drop, books may become so much trash in the borrower’s mind. If shelving is sloppy, with materials stuffed in helter-skelter, with books leaning so loosely they warp, with periodicals falling off shelves or overloaded and unbalanced carts, the users’ attitude toward library materials will deteriorate.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Ryckman, “Chimera,” 8.

⁶⁹ Normandy Simons Helmer, “*Selling Preservation in School Libraries*,” in *Promoting Preservation Awareness in Libraries: A Sourcebook for Academic, Public, School, and Special Collections*, ed. Jeanne M. Drewes and Julie A. Page (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 131.

⁷⁰ G. Edward Evans, , Anthony J. Amodio, and Thomas L. Carter, *Introduction to Library Public Services*, 6th ed. (Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1999), 241.

Patron education is another low-cost preservation activity. In this arena, it is important to provide reasons for the behavior modifications being requested, what “might be termed the why’s of preservation...follow these why’s with alternatives that will change their behavior. Decide what you want them to do instead, then tell them how to do it.”⁷¹ Particularly with adult patrons, this approach might work better than a simple list of orders. Including these explanations, in various guises, in patron-staff interactions at the library service desk, at library-sponsored book discussion groups, and during children’s storytimes are other options in user education. Request that pages not be dog-eared, for example, and explain that this means the books will likely be less enjoyable for others, in addition to wearing out faster and therefore being removed from the collection more quickly. It also means that money spent on the replacement cannot be spent on a new, different title, another reason which might resonate with patrons. Ask that bookmarks be used instead, and provide some if finances allow. Keep a supply of plastic bags to hand out (with an attendant explanation) on rainy days. Provide visible preservation information such as posters and displays of damaged materials. Overall, staff should understand, and attempt to make patrons understand, preservation as a tool that supports continued circulation and use of the materials.

Disaster planning is another concept that can prove highly useful in the public library environment. While there are certainly problems that plague academic and research collections more than public ones, disasters, natural and otherwise, are not one of them. If response plans are developed in advance of disaster, the loss of materials can be reduced. It can be difficult enough to maximize a materials budget; libraries,

⁷¹ Julie A. Page, “Reaching Your Customers: The First Steps,” in *Promoting Preservation Awareness in Libraries: A Sourcebook for Academic, Public, School, and Special Collections*, ed. Jeanne M. Drewes and Julie A. Page (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 6.

particularly those with limited funding and little insurance, cannot afford to lose materials to disasters. Take the time to decide which portions of the collection would have priority in disaster recovery, which staff members need to be involved and how, what additional training is necessary and how to obtain it. The Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) has made a worksheet for outlining a disaster plan, which is both comprehensive and freely available on the Internet.⁷²

Selecting materials in durable formats when they are available is another potentially useful suggestion offered by the academic preservation community. This is the idea that, by choosing items made from “quality materials, [the selector] can help postpone the day when the library must reinvest in the title because it is damaged or worn.”⁷³ There is already some evidence that public libraries follow this idea to a certain degree. When addressing the subject of children’s books, one weeding manual stated that Little Golden Books “do not have bindings meant to stand up to constant use and abuse,” and were thus completely unsuitable for purchase by and inclusion in public libraries.⁷⁴ However, in some cases the opportunity to practice this may be limited. For example, hardcovers are generally considered more durable than paperbacks, and so it would seem both more sensible and more cost-effective to purchase hardcovers when given the option. But when purchasing for a YA collection, it is important to bear in mind that teenagers typically prefer paperbacks, and will often refuse to check out hardcovers. Also, many public libraries will buy multiple copies of classics and modern classics, either because they are in perpetual demand or in preparation for a run on a

⁷² Karen E. Brown, “Worksheet for Outlining a Disaster Plan,” *Preservation of Library & Archival Materials: A Manual*. (Andover, MA: Northeast Document Conservation Center, 1999.)

<http://www.nedcc.org/plam3/tleaf34.htm>

⁷³ Higgenbotham Wild, *Blueprint*, 32.

⁷⁴ Boon, *CREW*, 20.

particular title. Purchasing hardcovers would be of dubious benefit in such cases, for reasons of space or money.

The techniques of mending and repair, already practiced to some degree by most public libraries, are another applicable product of the academic preservation environment. There will always be minor damage to materials, not enough to justify withdrawal or replacement just yet, but too much not to worsen with continued use. By repairing materials when damage is still minor, more extensive (and expensive) damage may be averted; repairs can in some respects be a preventive measure, as well as a reactive one. For instance, tightening a hinge is a fairly simple repair job, requiring minimal materials, which can take as little as five minutes to do.⁷⁵ If a loose hinge is left unchecked, the book soon tears out of the cover. Once the book has torn out of the cover, the repair requires more in the way of tools, materials, skill, and time; a skilled employee doing a batch of such repairs will require approximately 25 minutes for each.⁷⁶

As an added bonus, the repairs that public library materials are most likely to require are not overly difficult to perform. Repairing torn pages requires either tape for items not intended for permanent retention, and either mending tissue and adhesive or heat-set tissue and a tacking iron for materials that are intended to remain in the collection long-term. None of the three approaches is particularly labor- or time-intensive, requiring only about 5 minutes for each item.⁷⁷ Tipping in pages, repairing torn spines, and certain cover repairs are also considered part of a basic mending program. As such, instructions on how to perform them and the materials needed to

⁷⁵ Carolyn Clark Morrow and Carole Dyal, *Conservation Treatment Procedures* (Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1986), 15.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 105 & 113.

execute them are readily available. In that sense, repair is a viable option for public libraries experiencing such difficulties. The required materials for the repairs listed above are generally inexpensive and staff wages not an out-of-pocket expense.

Additionally, prompt and appropriate repairs can help save the library money; in some cases, the cost of a repair is less than that of replacing the book.

There are, however, several caveats to this. First, for all repair techniques, “there is a significant minimum of education and practice that is needed for any work at all.”⁷⁸ The conservation mandate of “do no harm” is as applicable to children’s books as it is for rare materials; repairs should be done properly, so that they do not shorten the life of the book instead of extending it. Learning how to do that requires time and effort, and while that learning process is going on, repairs may not be cost-effective.

Additionally, the more time-consuming repairs may not be more cost-effective than replacement, particularly for libraries with staffing shortages. As one source points out, “in the early days of public libraries,” when materials cost more and staff time less, it was “worthwhile to devote hours to the mending of materials to preserve them, even when replacement copies could be purchased.”⁷⁹ The economy of this practice today, the writer goes on to say, can be questionable. Labor is no longer inexpensive. On the contrary, it accounts for the greatest percentage of total operating funds (between 50 and 80 percent) of public libraries; collection expenditures typically absorb far less.⁸⁰ If something is readily available, replacement and its associated costs may be a better financial decision than undertaking significant repairs. Above all it is important to

⁷⁸ DeCandido, *Collections Conservation*, 8.

⁷⁹ Darlene Weingand, *Managing Today’s Public Library: Blueprint for Change* (Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1994), 165.

⁸⁰ National Center for Education Statistics, *E.D. TAB: Public Libraries in the United States: FY 1997*, Table 14. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2000/2000316.pdf>

remember that neither repair nor replacement is in itself a solution. While the need for some repairs is inevitable, a knowledge of proper mending is no substitute for preventive measures. After all, “if improved handling methods decrease the amount of repairs required, those financial resources can be used in other ways.”⁸¹

Avenues of Training

There are a variety of ways in which to obtain training in all of these approaches. There are videos, books, workshops, and web resources dealing with everything from preservation administration to education to repair. (A selected bibliography of the most widely recommended and/or most readily available of these tools appears in the appendix.) Workshops are perhaps one of the best available vehicles for instruction, since they can provide hands-on experience under the guidance of a knowledgeable instructor and an opportunity to discuss issues with others in the same situation. Additionally, a face-to-face interaction may help ensure that staff receive information that is directly applicable to their particular situation. For instance, while in a research library which retains its holdings long-term, adhesive-backed plastic paperback stiffeners are not at all advisable, the same thing in a frequently and heavily weeded public library collection may serve the institution’s needs perfectly well.⁸² Workshops in both preservation management and repair techniques may be available through state libraries, statewide preservation organizations, and regional preservation consortia. In addition to being available as pre-scheduled programs, some organizations will also present

⁸¹ Helmer, “*Selling Preservation*,” 135.

⁸² Andrea Rolich and Janice Mohlhenrich, “Staff and User Education Programs for Local and Statewide Initiatives,” in *Promoting Preservation Awareness in Libraries: A Sourcebook for Academic, Public, School, and Special Collections*, ed. Jeanne M. Drewes and Julie A. Page (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 29.

workshops on request; groups of interested public libraries can pool their resources to request workshops specifically tailored to their concerns.

It is clear that preservation concerns are being thought about in public libraries, even if those concerns are rarely articulated as such. While the resources developed for the library world in general are helpful, it would be most useful to have some geared toward public libraries in particular. Workshops are an especially effective training tool not only because they allow for face-to-face interaction, but also because they permit programs to be adapted as necessary for whoever is attending. An attendee from a public library may ask if plastic paperback stiffeners are taboo for her institution as well as for the academic libraries represented, and she will receive reassurance that no, they're fine for your library. It would be beneficial if other types of training tools were created to help contextualize preservation for the public library community in general.

Conclusions

Overall, there are many benefits to be gained by public libraries if the lessons of the academic world are adapted. It is the perception of preservation, not the reality of it, that has proven problematic, both in the past and in the present. The preservation literature and resources produced by the academic library community generally have not addressed the public library community directly, and so it has been easy for the latter to dismiss the underlying ideas. It would certainly be helpful if more were written tailored to the public library perspective, and public libraries need to learn more about how preservation can be consistent with and supportive of their own goals.

Preservation can be “both salvation techniques for civilization’s enduring records and prudent, cost-conscious resource management that uses a library’s budget as

effectively as possible.”⁸³ That latter is one of the most oft-mentioned benefits of integrating preservation into the daily functioning of the library; it is a good way to protect what is an admittedly expensive investment. The average public library spends between 15 and 25 percent of total operating funds on materials.⁸⁴ Nor is the initial outlay of money in purchase the only point at which materials cost money. Even if most of them earn their right to shelf space for less than ten years, each one will contribute to library overhead several times, during cataloging and physical preparation for the shelves, for instance. There is also the possibility that protecting those materials can free up money that would have been spent on replacements for irretrievably damaged works. The funding could then be put toward purchasing additional copies of highly-demanded works or more new titles.

Preservation is also a good way to fulfill the service philosophy of the public library. It has been said that “it is not the intent of preservationists to stop use but rather to stop misuse. By keeping materials available and in good condition they are more inviting to use and to borrow.”⁸⁵ This is entirely compatible with the collection development and maintenance goals of the typical public library. Materials are purchased in multiple copies in order so that titles will be available to more patrons with shorter waiting times. Items are weeded and replaced with regularity so that they are more inviting to use. One public library director, reminded of the institutions of his childhood, remarked that “there would be hell to pay if the book you read got a fingerprint on it. Books weren’t things to be used and enjoyed, but only revered and

⁸³ Speller, “Reconceptualizing,” 3.

⁸⁴ Baker, *The Responsive Public Library Collection*, 234-5.

⁸⁵ Page, “Reaching Your Customers,” 6

saved, fingerprint free of course.”⁸⁶ In preservation as it can exist in the public library environment, books are meant to be used, enjoyed, and given the respect that allows them to continue being used and enjoyed as long as possible.

⁸⁶ Paul John Cirino, *The Business of Running a Library* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., Inc., 1991), 141.

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Appendix

Selected Resources

Staff and User Education

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